



WISEWOMAN

Success Story 3 Alaska's Southcentral Foundation Engages Women to Learn About Tobacco Risks

Location Anchorage, Alaska

Focus Motivate women to stay engaged in classes that educate them about the health risks related to tobacco and the resources that will help them quit using it.

Strategy WISEWOMAN staff solicited participants' input, and redesigned its lifestyle intervention classes accordingly. The classes are now less formal. They include a video developed for American Indians to encourage tobacco cessation, educational games, and a chance for women to share their personal experiences.

Early Successes The women appear to enjoy playing the educational games. They also seem to concentrate more on the information being presented to them. As the women listen to other class participants tell stories about quitting smoking, they realize quitting is not easy, but it can be done. Listening to others' stories also encourages women to share their own trials and successes.

Participants who use tobacco have a better understanding of how it affects their health. Nonsmokers learn about resources that can help their partners, children, and family members quit.

For More Information

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Alaska's Southcentral Foundation Engages Women to Learn About Tobacco Risks

Tobacco use is a touchy subject. Many Alaska Native women know that smoking and chewing tobacco present health risks. But often those who use tobacco do not want to hear about its dangers, and those who do not use tobacco aren't interested because they think the information does not pertain to them.

Southcentral Foundation's *Traditions of the Heart* program addresses tobacco use as part of its lifestyle intervention, a 12-week program that integrates nutrition, physical activity, stress management, and tobacco information. Women attend a 2-hour class each week. The staff realized that the tobacco information classes were not popular. They feared women would avoid the classes or quit the intervention altogether, and miss learning about nutrition, physical activity, and stress management.

Southcentral Foundation decided to revamp its tobacco information classes to keep participants coming back by developing new ways to give women information about both tobacco-related risks and the resources available to help them quit using tobacco.

Staff asked participants to complete program evaluations, which identified the women's dislike for the tobacco information component. The evaluation showed the women preferred a less formal environment, one where the instructor interacts with participants, and participants can share their personal experiences with the group. Now three of the favorite components of the tobacco information sessions are watching a video, sharing quitting stories, and playing games. The video "It is your life," produced by the Center for American Indian Research and Education, was developed specifically for American Indians as a tool to encourage tobacco cessation. Participants often identify with the people in the video and thus share their own stories or stories of family members who have successfully quit using tobacco.

An entire tobacco class is dedicated to sharing personal stories. In sharing, women realize that it is not an easy task to quit smoking, but it can be done, and they often are open to sharing their own trials and successes with tobacco cessation. If a woman decides she wants to quit using tobacco, staff members refer her to the Southcentral Foundation Tobacco Cessation program and provide information about the state QuitLine and other local resources.

Perhaps the biggest change in the class format based on participant input was an increased emphasis on fun. Many participants enjoy playing bingo, so the staff created R-I-S-K-Y Bingo. Each woman is given a card with phrases or terms such as "asthma in children," "kidney cancer," and "esophagus cancer" printed on them. The staff members read the

term and share a related statistic, and if a woman has the correct corresponding term on her card, she gets to cover a square.

"The games work well because the ladies concentrate more," Southcentral Foundation Dietitian Diane Russo says. "They can be active participants, which is more interesting to them. They love playing the games and it reinforces the information we are sharing with them." Bingo was such a hit that one participant suggested using another game to relay tobacco information.

Soon Tobacco Jeopardy was developed. The women in the class divide into two teams and compete by answering questions from categories like "Odds and Ends" for \$200. Tobacco Roulette was also added to the class repertoire.

Developing the games was easy. Staff used information about the risks of tobacco use and the benefits of quitting from online resources such as the American Heart Association and the Alaska Tobacco Control Alliance. The only costs were the time to design the game materials and the money to laminate game pieces, mount game boards, and buy prizes.

Importance of Success

Women still rate the tobacco component as their least favorite part of the 12-week *Traditions of the Heart* program, but now they attend, participate, and have a better understanding of ways in which tobacco use harms their health. When staff hand out the cigarette calculators that show how much it costs to smoke a pack a day for 1 year, 2 years, or 5 or 10 years, most of the women gasp. They are stunned to see examples of all the other things they could buy with that money. Even the women who are not tobacco users benefit from the program. They now have ideas to help motivate their partners, children, and other family members to quit.

Lessons Learned

- Listening to what participants want and changing the program accordingly can make a big difference in class attendance and participation. Fun and interactive games can improve participants' acceptance of classes.
- Sharing personal stories encourages women to tell their own stories of struggle or accomplishment and demonstrates that it is possible to quit using tobacco.
- It is important to convey messages without intimidating those who use tobacco products. Instructors who do not judge tobacco users contribute to the success of the program, particularly in a group session where women may feel vulnerable.

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—Diane Russo
Dietitian
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